‘The Weight Falls on My Shoulders’: Close Relationships and Women’s Wellbeing in India[1]

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[A] Introduction

‘The weight falls on my shoulders’ is the way a young married woman, Mangali[2], chose to sum up her relationship with her husband on the first occasion Shreya met her, in rural Chhattisgarh (India) 2011. The statement was striking, because in a few words it challenged a host of norms and assumptions about gender, marriage, etiquette and wellbeing. In a cultural context that values male dominance and women’s deference, it was a direct claim of female centrality. Against expectations in the empowerment literature that women’s agency is something to celebrate, Mangali posed her responsibility as burdensome and counter to her own desires. Where social norms counsel discretion and acceptance of one’s lot, Mangali voiced a barely veiled criticism of her husband and an open statement of her own discontent with relationships at home, and that to a virtual stranger.

This chapter draws on mixed method research in Chhattisgarh, 2010-2013, to explore the associations between close relationships and wellbeing, and how methods of research are implicated in the results they produce. The chapter begins

with a brief introduction to the literature on women's wellbeing and close relationships, particularly in the context of South Asia. It then introduces the methodology of the present research, and describes the challenges we encountered in devising a robust scale to measure subjective dimensions of wellbeing in the context of close relationships. We present some of the results we generated, and our response to and interpretation of these. While we reflect on quantitative data, we do so within an interpretivist paradigm, rather than seeking to use quantitative analysis to drive the argument.

The second part of the chapter returns to the case of Mangali and that of another unusually 'empowered' woman in the same community. Concentrating on these two case studies enables us to go into some of the complexity of specific examples which may be lost in the overall numbers. This is particularly evident in the second case study which includes the dimension of time, since it was built up through numerous research encounters over a 30 month period. Nonetheless, concentrating mainly on two individuals clearly limits the kind of generalisation that the chapter can aim to make. The intention is not to claim that these women are typical of the community to which they belong, they are interesting precisely because of how a-typical they are. The evidence presented here does however suggest two points of broader applicability. Methodologically, it draws attention to the difference between high quantitative scores given in response to direct survey questions about close relationships, with much more equivocal qualitative accounts. This suggests the difficulty of getting accurate quantitative data on the quality of relationships, and the importance of qualitative methods to balance and aid interpretation of quantitative scores. Substantively, the chapter questions the way that relationships are often presented as having an 'effect on' wellbeing, with both relationships and wellbeing imagined in rather static and reified terms. These women's narratives support

instead a view of wellbeing as a process of active construction, in which women's everyday management and negotiation of relationships play a significant part.

[A] Women's Wellbeing and Close Relationships

The importance of relationships is widely recognised across the wellbeing literature. Ryan and Deci (2001) posit 'relatedness' as one of the three basic psychological needs in their Self-Determination Theory (SDT). They add that it is when a relationship satisfies these three needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness that it can be thought of as contributing to people's wellbeing. Ryff (1989) and Ryff and Singer (2008) include 'positive relations with others' as one of the six domains in their model of Psychological Wellbeing (PWB).[3] Seligman (2011) includes positive relationships as one of the five elements in his 'wellbeing theory', and sees relationships as critical to evolutionary survival and human flourishing.[4]

Amongst relationships considered to be important to wellbeing there is a particular focus on marriage, which (reflecting its origins in the global North) centres mainly on the couple as dyad, rather than a broader based alliance between kin. The association between marriage and wellbeing is generally claimed to be significant and positive (Glenn 1975; Myers 1999). However, Gove *et al.* (1983) caution that the connections between marriage and psychological wellbeing are poorly specified, with quality of relationship being potentially more important, especially for women, than marital status *per se*. The economists Stutzer and Frey (2006) also question the assumed direction of influence as they analyse 17 years of the German Socio-Economic Panel Survey.[5] They argue that happier people are more likely to get married, rather than that marriage makes people happier.[6]

Studies of wellbeing in the South Asian context confirm the broader picture of the importance of relationships to wellbeing. Biswas-Diener and Diener (2001; 2006) for example, found in two studies of people at the margins in Kolkata, India[7] that people recorded very high satisfaction scores for their social and family lives. In the first study satisfaction scores on a scale of 1 to 3 were 2.50 for family and 2.40 for friends (Biswas-Diener and Diener 2001:343). In the second study, on a scale of 1 to 7 the respondents in Kolkata scored their social satisfaction at 5.08 and family at 5.93 (Biswas-Diener and Diener 2006:195). The authors suggest that this indicates a trade off between material and social needs: 'to the extent the poor can utilise their strong social relationships, the negative effects of poverty are counterbalanced' (Biswas-Diener and Diener 2001: 347). While we welcome the recognition of a more social dimension within a literature that tends to be over-individualised, our discussion in this chapter suggests that this conclusion may be premature. As described below, qualitative evidence suggests a rather more ambivalent picture rather than a felicitous trade-off between material and social spheres.

White (1992) suggests that good relationships with key family members (particularly husbands and fathers-in-law) are important in enabling women in rural Bangladesh to expand the horizons of their economic activities. This contrasts with the received wisdom in much empowerment literature, that increased voice in the family is an *outcome* of women's earnings. Camfield *et al.* (2009), again in Bangladesh, use mixed methods research to discuss the significance of relationships to wellbeing. Confirming the general consensus on the importance of relationships, they add that qualitative analysis can provide additional insights especially regarding *the form* that such influence takes. Their qualitative data indicated that close relationships intertwine affective and economic dimensions in the household, as love is shown through provision and mutual care (see also White and Ramirez, this volume). While

emotional ties are a source of happiness, there is also a strong social and status dimension. Thus a household head who rated his happiness highly linked this to the fact that there was consensus in their household and everyone obeyed him (Camfield *et al*. 2009: 82). Sons and daughters-in-law similarly linked their happiness at least in part to looking after their parents (in-law) well; this is important both in itself and because being able to manage these relationships successfully enhances reputation in the community (Camfield *et al.* 2009: 82-84). Such expressions of family life indicate that close relationships are not simply 'personal' or 'natural', but strongly governed by social norms and expectations. One dimension of this that bears significantly on narratives of wellbeing is a strong emphasis on presenting the family in the best possible light; this is discussed next.

Ahmed (2010: 45) points to the ideological weight carried by the family as 'a happy object, one that binds and is binding.' As Uberoi (1994: 2) describes, this is strongly marked in India, making discussion of any shortcomings highly sensitive:

> It is as though critical interrogation of the family might constitute an intrusion into that very private domain where the nation's most cherished cultural values are nurtured and reproduced, as though the very fabric of society would be undone if the family were in any way questioned or reshaped.

Palriwala (1999: 49) describes family and community in India as encapsulating '… the most sacred and natural of relationships – between children and parents, wife and husband, sister and brother, devotee and god.' She goes on, however, to note a fundamental ambivalence, as the family is both '… the community of cooperation and the community of sanction' (Palriwala 1999: 54). Rowlands (1997: 125) echoes this as she discusses how intimate relationships may be simultaneously supportive and disempowering in the context of Honduras. Her study of women's empowerment

confirms the findings of others that it is in the sphere of intimate relationships that women find it most difficult to express agency, communicate their need for change and bring about desired change (Rowlands 1997, Murphy-Graham 2010).

In South Asia at least, the *ideology* of the 'happy family' joins together with the *material* centrality of the family in securing welfare and the *social* importance of family and marriage particularly, as a key site for the reproduction and reconfiguration of gender and other forms of social difference such as caste and class (Abeyasekera 2013). Not surprisingly, this results in tensions between public presentations and lived experiences of conjugal relationships. Women behave in ways that can be eased into locally prevalent discourses of ideal wives/ mothers/ women as a means of avoiding censure while still managing to achieve their aims. Thapan (2003: 81) found that women and girls in Delhi slums strongly identified their own wellbeing with that of their families. Nonetheless, she suggests:

> 'While providing security, fulfilment, and identity to women, marriage is also a context within which many of them find their opportunities and options limited. I found that women engage in a twin-track process of compliance and resistance, submission and rebellion, silence and speech, to question their oppression in the family, community, and society. Resistance can be overt and vocal, or muted, expressed in everyday life, in 'gestures, habits, desires – that are grounded in the body ... as the sources of resistance and protest' (Kielmann 1998: 129 in Thapan 2003: 77)

Sanctions against exposing any imperfection in the family unit mean that women's manoeuvring in close relationships is frequently obscured. Agarwal (1996: 430) emphasises that '... appearance of compliance need not mean that women lack a

perception of their best interests; rather it can reflect a survival strategy stemming from the constraints on their ability to act overtly in pursuit of those interests.' Jeffery and Jeffery (1996), narrating women's lives in rural North India, describe how even when women openly defy gender norms within conjugal relationships they generally seek to legitimise this in some way, commonly for instance by invoking 'for the sake of the children', thus justifying those actions by apparently conforming to idealised norms of motherhood.

This brief review of a broad literature demonstrates a wide consensus that family relationships, and particularly marriage, are important to wellbeing. While we have concentrated here on social and psychological dimensions, marriage and familiy are also critical to the achievement of material wellbeing. Paradoxically, however, the very centrality of family and marriage relationships to wellbeing may make them difficult to investigate, as they present such a concentrated site of social, psychological and economic investment. The following sections describe how we encountered some dimensions of this and the implications for different methods of wellbeing research.

[A] Methodology

The study presented here was part of the 'wellbeing pathways' research described in White and Ramirez (this volume) and followed the same methodology.[8] It investigated both how people were doing in 'objective' terms (livelihoods, health and education, plus access to government services) and 'subjectively' how they were thinking and feeling about their lives. In exploring subjective dimensions of wellbeing we developed the concept 'inner wellbeing', to describe what people feel and think

themselves able to do and be. Inner wellbeing comprises seven interconnected domains, of which close relationships is one.[9]

This chapter draws on an integrated, mixed method approach over two main research periods, February to May 2011 and 2013, plus an initial short visit in November 2010. Shreya Jha led the field research team of four local peer researchers, whom we employed with the assistance of a local Non-Governmental Organisation, Chaupal. They provided critical support in introducing us to the research area, helped with interpretation of the local dialect, and undertook many of the surveys themselves. Sarah White as project director visited for shorter times.

In-depth qualitative grounding and piloting were used to generate questions which would enable us to track both 'objective' and 'subjective' dimensions of wellbeing. For the inner wellbeing section we began with six items (November 2010) which we reduced to four items for the first main round of fieldwork (2011). At that time we had eight domains and were concerned at the burden on respondents of retaining a larger number of items in each. After analysis of our first round of data we finally settled on seven domains with five items in each (2013). A fuller account of the development of the survey and the statistical validation of the inner wellbeing model (IWB) are given elsewhere (White *et al.* 2012a and b, White and Jha 2014a, White *et al.* 2014). Survey data were generated through individual interviews – 339 in 2011 and 368 in 2013. 187 people (55 per cent) of those surveyed in 2011 were surveyed again in 2013.

Both the organisation of the survey and our personal approach was designed to reflect a conversational style which would create space for people to speak in detail and for the interview to assume a natural flow (see Bryman 2001: 93-97). We also recorded observations on informal conversations to help contextualise the narratives.

To deepen our understanding of local constructions of wellbeing we did in-depth qualitative interviews with people who seemed both ‘typical’ and 'atypical’ of the area to comprehend the diversity of people’s lives. Qualitative data include 151 survey notes and full transcriptions of 30 interviews. The in-depth interviews were open-ended conversations which were partially structured around themes that had arisen in earlier conversations with the same people, but also broadened to include people’s life-stories so as to accommodate topics that might not otherwise have arisen. In most cases the in-depth interview was with someone with whom a relationship had already been established through the survey interview.

[B] The Study Context[10]

The research took place in four villages in Sarguja district, Chattisgarh state, where the population was predominantly Adivasi or ‘tribal’.[11] While the villages differ in terms of ease of access, environmental location (close to river, hill or forest), degree of poverty, and dominant community, overall the villages are extremely poor, and until a recent food security programme people frequently had to go hungry. Literacy levels are very low, with more than half of the respondents never having gone to school. The mainstay of the economy is (mostly rain-fed) agriculture, and most people do some farming, supplemented by casual labour and gathering non-timber forest products. Despite being formally outside the caste system, caste-type practices are followed. Marriage is patri-local, with women moving to live with their husband’s family, often in a joint family context, at least at first.[12] Our 2013 survey found 19 per cent of respondents lived in joint households (including more than one married couple), with a further 14 per cent in extended households (including one married couple plus at least one other adult, but not a second married couple), 52 per cent were in nuclear households (one couple and unmarried children) and 11 per

cent in sub-nuclear households (a couple or single person without children) (Fernandez *et al.* 2014:18).

Both of the case study women are from the locally dominant Kanwar Adivasi community. Conventionally gender relations are thought to be more egalitarian in Adivasi than other parts of Indian society. Xaxa (2004) is one of several writers who question this. While Xaxa points out that several factors do indeed differentiate Adivasi from 'mainstream women,' he cautions against reading any single difference as sufficient to make generalisations either regarding Adivasi women's equal position vis-à-vis Adivasi men or to their being in a relatively better position than non-Adivasi women. Far from being the 'untouched tribes' of anthropological legend, Xaxa point out that broad changes in political economy and society have affected Adivasi communities in both negative and positive ways, resulting in very heterogenous experiences and situations.

[A] Constructing the Close Relationships Domain

Seeking to measure psychosocial wellbeing amongst people who were completely unused to this type of survey proved extremely challenging. Our aim was to devise questions that resonated with how people talk and think locally, rather than simply apply a framework that had been developed in a very different context. Even when you try to make the content of such questions culturally appropriate, however, their form still requires people to abstract from and generalise about their lives, to choose from a graduated set of responses the one which seems to fit their experience best. None of this is easy. Even given this general difficulty, however, it was the domain of close relationships that proved by far the hardest to capture. In part this reflected the ways that this area of life is governed by particularly strong norms about what

should be said, as introduced above. But it was also because people were simply not used to discussing their marriage and family relationships in such direct terms. We thus struggled to devise appropriate questions. To give an example, during piloting in Sarguja we were trying to ask a woman about her experience of love and support in her family – a standard 'quality of relationships' dimension in Western surveys. She responded in three ways. First, she said she always worries about her husband going to another village and that he will drink there and maybe fall down and what will happen to him. If her husband was at home then she would have cooked for him and fed him and known he was safe at home, but if he is out then she worries about him and cannot sleep. Second, she said she was married in front of several people. Finally – and in some exasperation with us – she said surely he loves her since they have been living together so long and have had five children together!

We eventually settled on four questions, which are given in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1: Close relationship items in round one fieldwork (2011)

Analysis of the 2011 data showed that three of the four items (numbers 1, 2 and 4) correlated significantly with each other. This was confirmed through Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) which tests the way that responses across the range of items group together, suggesting that they reflect a number of distinct underlying factors or domains. We were therefore able to be confident that these three items together constituted the close relationship domain. The exception was the third item, which sought to raise possible tensions between personal priorities and family demands. This item did not only fail to fit within the close relationships domain, but nor did it fit within the inner wellbeing scale as a whole, as it correlated significantly only with

three of the other 31 items and did not load onto any factor in the EFA. Nevertheless, validating a domain with three out of four items was, in statistical terms a success, as it is common to have to drop items which do not fit (see White and Ramirez, this volume).

A rather different issue was the high level of scores for this domain, and following on from this, our questioning about what lay behind the consistent pattern of response in these three items. Did it reflect exceptionally positive experience of relationships, or simply the strength of a 'happy family' ideology? Taking a simple average of the item scores within each domain the mean for the close relationships domain was extremely high, at 4.62 out of 5 compared with an average of 2.47 across the other domains.[13] This was at odds with our own experience in other qualitative research in India and Bangladesh and observations and interview based evidence within this same study. We therefore believed that the major reason for this is the strong positivity bias suggested above – whatever their actual experience, people thought that family unity was what should be projected. In the second round of the survey we re-used the questions that had 'worked' (i.e. correlated with one another) in 2011, though with some re-wording. We also sought to develop some new questions which we hoped would not trigger the same associations. The 2013 close relationship questions are presented in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2: Close relationship items in round two fieldwork (2013)

Analysis of the data from round two (2013) showed that the original three items continued to correlate consistently with one another. Now appearing as items 1, 2

and 4, they clearly associate with ideologies of the happy family, consisting of how people get along, care for each other, and resolve any problems that arise. The items were again scored very highly, with a mean of 4.53 between them, compared with a mean of 3.16 of the 30 items across the other domains. By contrast, the two new items were scored very low, at 2.83 and 2.75 respectively.

The statistics showed that again we had one item that did not correlate significantly with any of the others in the domain.[14] This was item 3, 'when your mind is troubled, do you feel there is someone you can go to?' This is the one item that does not refer specifically to family or household relationships. Qualitative comments confirmed that people did not tend to associate talking of troubles with the close family. Instead, people tended to talk of family relationships in terms of (reciprocal) roles and responsibilities and hence the pragmatic need to co-operate. This emphasis on structural relationships may be intensified in small-holder farming communities like these, where the family household constitutes the primary unit of production and consumption. A common response to the second question, for example, was 'if we fight then how do we work together and run the household?' Interdependence is similarly stressed in another response from a man to the same question: 'when we fight, she stops cooking, then I cook, if we don't eat how do we work?' In such contexts, as the case studies suggest below, agency may be expressed through silence, rather than speech (see also White, Fernandez and Jha, forthcoming).

The patterns of response to the item on violence showed significant correlations with the second question, about being able to resolve conflicts in the family. Where question 2 was scored high overall, however, the one on violence was scored low. This merits some attention. We had tried earlier to have a question on violence, but found that it was met simply with denial – there was no problem in their family – and hence very high scores. This denial of domestic violence even in communities where

it is known to be prevalent, is a common difficulty with surveys. This question took a different tack, assuming the presence of violence and asking how people felt about it. It was striking that this met with very few denials, and where people did say that there was no violence in their house, they substantiated the claim in ways that made it seem genuine. While there were some cases of women being violent (usually, though not only, to other women) the vast majority of instances of violence mentioned involved men.

What was particularly interesting, is that men answered this question significantly more negatively than women. This ran counter to the general pattern, that men's IWB answers tended to be significantly more positive than women's. For the violence question, the mean score for men was 2.43, while that for all women was 3.04, breaking down into 2.97 for married women and 3.55 for single women. Statistical analysis confirms that responses to this question were significantly and positively correlated with both gender and marital status.[15] While it is commonly known, of course, that men feel remorse for their violence in the home which they yet continue to perpetrate, the suggestion from this data that violence has a more negative effect on men's sense of wellbeing than it does on women's, indicates interesting potential for a new approach to mobilisation amongst men against gender based violence. Amongst women, even when they expressed strong concern about the level of violence in the household, this tended to be balanced by anxieties about what would happen to the children if the relationship ended: 'if I leave them then a step-mother may not look after them as well'; "if I remarry then a step-father will not look after them as well.'

In summary, then, we were unable to establish a close relationships domain within the inner wellbeing model that avoided the positivity bias of the 'happy family'. The items which consistently correlated with one another and emerged as a factor in

Factor Analysis were those that attracted the higher scores. In one way this did not matter. Although the scores were an average of around 25 per cent higher than in other domains, there was still sufficient variance in scores between people for the domain to 'work' as a measure of inner wellbeing. It does, however, constitute a warning against taking such scores at face value, in comparing the level of wellbeing in one domain against another. We return to this point in the conclusion.

[A] Case Studies

In this section we return to Mangali and introduce our second major character, Gulabi, to enable us to explore at closer quarters the associations between close relationships and wellbeing. We consider two issues, first, the implication of methods in rendering differing accounts of wellbeing and second, the substantive processes that produce wellbeing through family relationships.

[B] Mangali

Mangali is approximately 35 years old, a married woman living in a nuclear household with her husband and five daughters. Their home is within a large house built around a central courtyard. Other parts of the house are occupied by her parents-in-law and her brothers-in-law and their families, with each sub-unit cooking and budgeting separately. Mangali does household work and farming and their five daughters all go to school.

This section draws on a single interview which Shreya had with Mangali. Shreya was accompanied by Pritam, one of our local peer researchers who had already

completed a survey with Mangali. As described further below, Pritam happened to be from Mangali's natal village, making the association between them that of elder sister to younger brother. This helped in establishing an easy research relationship with her.

The interview began unusually. The intention had been to speak with Mangali's husband, but instead he sent Mangali out to see what Shreya wanted. Perhaps frustrated with this immediate context, Mangali said that she was forced to take the lead in anything that needed to be done '… typically in a married couple it is the man's job to talk first and take the lead when deciding anything and going out to do any work, but in our case it is always I who has to do all of this'. The contrast with the tight-lipped standard answers that we usually encountered when asking about close relationships was so striking that Shreya decided to continue the interview with her.

Although Shreya did not know it at the time, in the survey that Mangali had completed a few days earlier she had already shown her difference from her peers in her willingness to signal some degree of disharmony in family relationships. She gave scores of 4 out of 5 for two of the close relationship items (family unity and family care); 3 out of 5 for one (resolving problems in the family) and 2 for the other (being required to do things she didn't want to do). Even if we exclude this lowest scoring item, on the basis of its lack of correlation with the other items (see above), this makes an average of 3.67 for the close relationships domain as a whole. This is markedly lower than the close relations average of 4.62 for the whole sample.[16] It is also much of a piece with Mangali's other domain scores, which ranged from 2.25 (social connections) to 3.75 (economic confidence), with a mean of 2.97. In brief, Mangali's close relationship domain score bucked the usual trend. It was not much higher than the mean of her other domains, forming part of a cluster of three positive domain scores (two at 3.67 and one at 3.75).

As her narrative unfolded, Mangali developed further the fact of having to take the lead in her marriage, and the burden she felt this to be.

> M: …. not from today but from the time he married me… see there is nobody to support me. If there is an argument or anywhere (that) we have to go, whether in the village, to the shop, or in the neighbourhood… but he will not take the lead. He will keep the money but he will not be the one to say anything when he is in the shop. I'll tell you one thing; in a husband-wife relationship it is supposed to be the husband to take the weight but here all the weight falls on my shoulders. He will earn money but if he doesn't talk to anybody then I have to be the one who has to do the work.

As noted in the introduction, such direct criticism or admission of discomfort in family relationships was extremely rare, even in the joint family.[17] Much more common were general statements from which a particular experience could be inferred: 'where do husbands and wives not argue a little bit?' Mangali also challenged convention as she made it clear that it was her idea that she and her husband should separate from his parents and form a nuclear unit of their own. Breaking up the joint family is something that daughters-in-law in India are often blamed for, but rarely claim as their own initiative. Mangali does, however, conform to gendered narrative rules in justifying her behaviour as motivated by her children's interest, rather than her own:

> M: … it wasn't the parents-in-law who made me like this or my husband but the children that made me think. I decided that I would educate them, bring them up well and somehow ensure that I can give them a good future.

While she criticises him, the love of her husband has clearly been an important resource:

> S: And did you say that it has been like this from the time you got married?
>
> M: Yes, from the very beginning. But at that time I didn't want to take the lead because my parents-in-law were also there and they didn't like me… but my husband loves me. So then I thought 'doesn't matter if they (parents-in-law) don't like me, the two of us will live in peace and make our lives comfortable.' …

Mangali in fact suffered serious abuse, including physical violence, from her mother-in-law during her early marriage. Material and emotional support from her natal family have been important in enabling her to set up and sustain an independent household with her husband. That both she and her husband know she could, if necessary, leave and return to her natal family, also gives her an important source of power. This reflects what Sen (1987) calls the 'breakdown position' in his analysis of intra-household relationships in India as 'co-operative conflicts' – a woman who has a viable alternative if the relationship breaks down is in a much stronger position than one who does not. While overall she and her husband get on well, Mangali admits there are times when they argue. Reflecting the pattern mentioned above, however, she refers to the necessity of guarding her tongue in view of their need to work in co-operation:

> M: No, we care for each other but, of course, there are times when we fight. Sometimes I may say something harsh but then we would not be able to work together.

Mangali also says she does not discuss these matters with others in the village, even women her own age, although all women refer obliquely to similar issues.

> M: I never tell anybody about what is in my heart and sometimes it can eat me up inside. (Whenever) everything comes out then…

What emerges from the combination of qualitative and quantitative data is therefore a complex picture. In terms of the 'real' quality of her relationship with her husband, the overall impression is generally positive: Mangali feels loved and valued, and has a great deal of room for manoeuvre, even if she feels ambivalent about this. The unusual terms of their marital relationship, however, in which she takes the conventionally male role of the one who leads and negotiates on their joint behalf, seem to give her a certain freedom when it comes to the ideologies that govern the family, a readiness to 'tell it like it is', both in direct conversation and through the numerical scores. The fact that her close relationship domain score was rather lower than the average should not therefore be read as an indication of a poorer quality of relationship, but of her greater freedom with respect to the ideology. This should not be taken too far, however. Mangali's stated caution about telling others in her neighbourhood about 'what is in her heart' demonstrates that she was fully aware of the need to maintain the façade of female submission and the happy family, and the social peril that could be occasioned by sharing her disappointments with others.

The fact that Mangali was ready to share so openly with the research team seems to reflect a combination of factors. The first is that Pritam who had interviewed her for the survey and accompanied Shreya on the occasion reported here, was from Mangali's natal village. In North Indian culture there is a strong contrast between a woman's marital village as one of constraint and

conditionality, and her natal village as one of freedom and acceptance. The motif of 'older sister-younger brother' which Mangali drew on in characterising her relationship with Pritam is one of particular ease, closeness and safety in intimacy. The second factor is Mangali's perception of Shreya, as both an outsider and a similarly empowered woman, able to move about and talk to people as she wished. The third is the character and skill of Shreya and Pritam, eager to hear Mangali's story and ready to listen with empathy and understanding.

[B] Gulabi

In 2011 Gulabi was 39 years old, a married woman in one of the leading families of her village. Unusually, she had grown up in the main district town. This made for difficulties when she first moved to the village, because she was not accustomed to the same kind of housework, and faced a lot of teasing for being over-educated and under-skilled in domestic tasks. She lives in a joint household with her husband, parents-in-law, and three sons. She completed middle school (class eight) before her marriage 20 years ago and in 2012 completed her school-leaving exam (class 12) through open school.[18] Both she and her husband, Devsaya, have worked with a local community-based organisation (CBO) for many years. At the time of our first interview Gulabi had recently been elected as Sarpanch, the leader of the most immediate rung of local government, the panchayat.[19] Gulabi is thus very unusual, occupying a key public role that would not traditionally have been open to her, either as an Adivasi, or as a woman. Their association with the CBO has also made both Gulabi and Devsaya familiar with ideas of development and women's empowerment and they use this language when talking about their work.

We met Gulabi numerous times. Here we describe three surveys, one in-depth interview and one of many informal conversations with her. We first met in November 2010, when she and her husband had been asked to introduce us to their village as a potential research site. On this occasion Gulabi was quite reserved, deferring to Devsaya in discussions with us, with him answering questions posed to her and taking us around the village. Our first interview with her took place the next day. On her own with us she came across much more strongly, and we began to get a sense of the person she was.

In terms of the quantitative data, Gulabi conformed perfectly with the 'happy family' ideology. In all three surveys, from pre-piloting through the two rounds of fieldwork, she answered all of the core family relationships items with a resounding 5. In the main fieldwork surveys the only item which she gave a lower score (1) was in 2013, 'When your mind is troubled, do you feel there is someone you can go to?' Like Mangali, she emphasised the need to keep any troubles to herself and the danger of scandal if she were to talk 'outside'. As discussed above, this item cannot be considered to belong within the close relationships domain for these communities.

Table 6.3 and Figure 6.1 present Gulabi's domain scores in 2011 and 2013.[20] These clearly illustrate how Gulabi's life has expanded with the sarpanch role. In sharp contrast to most other women, her scores for the more social and political domains – agency and participation and social connections – are very high. Interestingly, the largest change between the two surveys is in her sense of self-worth, which is markedly higher in 2013. But overall there is considerable consistency between the two sets of scores. In both, physical and mental health comes out as by far the lowest – in fact the only negative score (3 being the mid-point). This was confirmed by Gulabi's frequent comments about the amount of work that she had to do, as she sought to balance her household responsibilities with the

demands of her political role as sarpanch. In both surveys she is only moderately positive about her economic position. She explained this by reference to the demands of her role in the CBO and as sarpanch, restricting the amount of attention she could give to farming. She was interestingly ambivalent in her scores in the values and meaning domain, which aims to gauge how people reflect on their life in more cosmic terms. While we did not discuss this with her, this might be read as an indication of a conviction that it is her own effort, rather than divine gift or good fortune, that is responsible for what she has achieved in life, and the sense of continuing struggle that remains.[21]

Table 6.3: Gulabi's domain scores, 2011 and 2013

Figure 6.1: Gulabi's domain scores, pivot graph, 2011 and 2013

Gulabi's comments explaining her scores were also interesting. Confirming the argument made more broadly in this volume, these reveal links between material, relational and subjective dimensions of wellbeing. In piloting she responded to the statement 'There is little harmony in our home' by saying that there is harmony now because they are economically better off, which makes life less stressful. In response to the statement 'I feel alone even when there are people around' she referred to hard times in her early married life when they were struggling financially

and nobody, not even her natal family, offered help and support even when she had asked for it.[22]

On the face of it, then, Gulabi's quantitative data indicate an empowered woman who is strongly supported within her close family, enabling her to take on an unusually prominent public role. The picture that emerges from the qualitative evidence, however, is rather more complex.

[C] Conditional harmony

The first aspect of this complexity, which first emerged during piloting, was the extent to which the 'good relationships' were dependent on Gulabi's own self-regulation. In explaining harmony in the home, she says she constantly checks herself from doing anything that she feels would displease Devsaya. If she did by chance offend him then he would tell her and she would be careful to avoid such behaviour in future. In the 2011 survey she explained that she would never hold on to grudges: where could she possibly go if she were to hold on to her anger? She added that the idea of not having 'her own' place makes her feel helpless. This is perhaps a reference to the strained relations with her natal family, who had failed to help her when she was in need. She also said that she would lose her honour and self-respect if she were to run away or talk outside about difficult situations in the home.

A qualitative interview in May 2011 provided the context for Gulabi to describe to Shreya in more detail how self-restraint, of both herself and her husband, played a critical role in producing good relationships in the home. It began by discussing Gulabi's early married life.

S: You talked about how you were unable to do all the work in the beginning and he had also thought that you are of a good household and you should stay in and manage the household but when your sisters-in-law and others would taunt you about being the educated daughter-in-law who couldn't do anything then what would he say?

G: He wouldn't pay attention to all those things. (*S: And did you ever tell him about these things?*) No, I wouldn't ever say anything. (*S: You would keep it to yourself…*) I am not able to and he would not have been able to tolerate it… neither have I ever complained to him, nor to my parents 'so-and-so says this or that'. I have never done any of that.

S: When you say that he would not have been able to tolerate it what do you think would have happened?

G: Then there would have been a fight, he would have said something to me … I don't say anything to him and nor does he say these things to me. I don't complain to him.

S: So you feel it might cause him to fight with them and then you could face the repercussions?

G: Yes, you never know, they could turn around and point a finger at me. I tolerate as much as I can.

S: And when it is no longer tolerable?

G: Then at that time then I may say something, sometimes others may say something.

S: Have there been occasions when you have been forced to say something? (*G: Yes occasionally…*) But you have noticed that he gets annoyed when you complain about such things…

G: Yes, he gets irritated so I don't say anything but he also never complains about anything to me.

The picture that emerges from this exchange is rather different to the simple presentation of positive relationships that is conveyed by the quantitative scores. It draws attention to the limits, the hidden terms which must be observed, the conditionality of the 'happy family' which rests on the compliance of some to the satisfaction of others. While a happy family is surely to be wished for, it also rests on the threat of sanction, with repercussions for both individual and family honour if it is contravened. Even for a remarkably empowered woman like Gulabi, what is required from her is restraint. There are two particular factors in her personal history that reinforce this. The first is that Gulabi experienced violence in her natal family, and has quite consciously sought to avoid any behaviour that might trigger violence in her marriage. She is grateful to Devsaya that he has never been violent to her, and also that he supports her as a woman in a public role, paying no heed to what others might say. In addition, she is conscious that as daughter-in-law to the village headman she belongs to a family that commands prestige locally. Lack of restraint on her part would therefore occasion considerable shame. The broader point is that the high survey scores are not just the result of a 'natural' state of good family

relationships; instead these relationships are achieved through constant negotiation and engagement in which some people carry a greater burden than others.

[C] Work

As noted above, work-load was a major issue for Gulabi, and it was in relation to this that some tensions in the house first emerged. In her 2011 survey, she gave as evidence of how people in the house cared for her, the fact that there was no pressure on her to do household work and she did only what she was able to. In relation to the health domain, however, she contradicted this as she responded to a question about tension that she constantly has headaches because of the amount of work she has to do. Once she has finished her work for the panchayat and CBO she must attend to the household work. This reflects both her sense that it would be unfair to leave it to her elderly mother-in-law, and her wish to avoid giving any cause for censure.

The issue of work-load framed the final interview between Shreya and Gulabi, which took place in 2013. Gulabi insisted that Shreya hold the interview at that time, because she was not sure when she would next get time to sit. Immediately after the survey finished her mother-in-law asked Gulabi something to which she replied that she had completed the task. Once her mother-in-law was out of hearing she turned to Shreya, almost rolling her eyes, and said '…they don't like it.' She continued that her parents-in-law resented the fact that she worked outside the home, with the CBO and panchayat, expressing their displeasure indirectly over the fact that she was not always around to complete all the household work. She added that she wakes up at 3.30 am during the farming seasons and works incessantly till about 10 pm, appealing to Shreya plaintively, '…what more can I do?'

Her husband then arrived and Gulabi resumed the thread of her conversation. She started by describing tension in the household in a somewhat indirect manner. She said that they are able to manage the household expenses because they both work, otherwise it would be difficult. She also added that Devsaya however does no household work. She spoke once more of her parents-in-law annoyance at her working but that she does not bother much about it because she knows that Devsaya supports her. Her work has also been vital to their ability to manage financially, especially in the earlier days of their marriage, when they were really struggling. However, she added that Devsaya tells her she must sort out these matters herself and not involve him in them. Confirming the point made above concerning her own self-regulation, Gulabi then went on to say that when they have a difference of opinion she keeps quiet and waits until he is ready to listen to her and it is only then that she voices her own feelings.

Although on the one hand Gulabi was talking to Shreya, she was also directing her remarks to Devsaya almost as if she was making Shreya a witness to a conversation between the two of them. Devsaya remained silent throughout but acknowledged that the remarks were also directed at him by nodding or smiling at times. Gulabi appeared watchful. It seemed that (at least) two things were going on. First, Gulabi appeared to be seeking a public validation of her role in contributing to the household, especially as she repeatedly emphasised that she took on most of the household tasks in addition to her work outside the home. Secondly, it appeared as if Gulabi might have been using Shreya's presence to make it safer to voice what are somewhat 'unacceptable' opinions. Shreya's particular positionality is relevant here. She was an outsider, an independent and educated woman, who would have been strongly identified with the notions of women's empowerment that both Gulabi and Devsaya were familiar with due to their work in the CBO. All of this, along with

Devsaya's own personality, would have made it very unlikely that he would have reprimanded Gulabi in Shreya's presence.

The depth of Shreya's interaction with Gulabi, using a variety of research instruments across two and a half years, gives us unusual scope to explore the genesis of accounts of wellbeing. There is a marked contrast between the maximum scores that Gulabi consistently gave to all the core family relationship items and her much more ambivalent qualitative narratives. The difference with Mangali, whose quantitative scores were much closer to her verbal accounts, suggests that Gulabi's sense of status required her to conform to the ideologically approved appearance of the 'happy family' when approached through the brute form of direct questions. Where there was more scope for nuance and ambiguity, and perhaps where the personal relationship with Shreya was more to the fore, a more ambivalent, polyvocal account could be presented.

A further issue is the identity of the researchers. The importance of the connection between Mangali and Pritam, as coming from the same village, is noted above as introducing an ease and confidence into the research relationship. Shreya's identity is also an important part of the story, as her views and perspectives affect how she received and interpreted responses and this in turn shaped the further questions she asked. Having trained and worked as a counsellor has a significant impact on how Shreya conducts herself in an interview setting. This is especially relevant to the domain of women's close relationships which Shreya's counselling experience has shown to be fraught with tension. Thus she works to keep a neutral tone so as not to suggest she is endorsing any 'right' view of marriage or the family, and the tenor of her questions may be to uncover complexity. This opens the possibility of co-construction, that what Gulabi and Mangali revealed to Shreya was as much a

response to what she asked, as her questions were a response to what she 'sensed' they may have been saying.

Time is also an important character in these accounts. The relationship between Shreya and Gulabi developed over time through repeated meetings, both fleeting and longer conversations. Over the course of these meetings the tone of the conversation changed, so that with each successive interview there was a greater degree of revelation. This was especially marked in the last informal conversation. Through this process it became possible to discern something of the everyday practice that goes into the construction of wellbeing: the reproductive labour of servicing the household; the social labour of sensing and accommodating oneself to the bounds of what is normative; and the personal labour of consuming one's disappointments and harms in silence and moving on.

[A] Conclusion

This chapter has brought together quantitative and qualitative data to investigate in the context of rural Chhattisgarh the widely remarked associations between close relationships and wellbeing. It began by noting the particularly privileged place of the family in South Asian society, which gives people – and especially women – a strong incentive to preserve the ideology of the 'happy family' and to represent their behaviour and experience in terms that conform to this ideal.

It then discussed the challenges involved in developing a quantitative scale that could track how people are thinking and feeling about their close relationships. A quantitative measure demands that people answer along a particular continuum, whereas their views about that particular issue may be qualified by other factors. It

also requires a summative score which cannot reflect the diversity within each person's life or how different situations in a person's life may make them act or feel differently (Bryman 2001). Despite our reservations we did manage to produce items which statistical analysis of correlations and factor analysis suggested belonged together as a close relationships domain. We were concerned, however, that the much higher scores in this domain compared with others suggested either a very high intrinsic quality of relationships or a high level of satisfaction with them. Both of these interpretations were at odds with other qualitative evidence.

Interestingly, very high satisfaction scores are also common in relationship studies in the west (Stanley Gaines, personal communication). Researchers have thought that this was due to the fact that those with more positive relationships would be more likely to volunteer for a relationship survey. Our suggestion is rather different, that the high scores reflect the strength of the 'happy family' ideology, and its centrality to understandings of wellbeing. Paradoxically, then, it may be that the very centrality of family relationships to social reproduction and to wellbeing makes it hard to produce an accurate metric for them. Personal factors also play a role in shaping what scores are given. In our case studies, Mangali's lower scores for the close relationship domain did not seem to reflect less happy relationships but a greater freedom with respect to the ideology, Gulabi's consistently high scores seem to reflect her strong awareness of social prestige and weaker breakdown position. Overall, the analysis here constitutes a warning against taking such scores at face value in comparing levels of wellbeing, between domains, between people, or between contexts.

The second part of the paper presented case studies of two unusually empowered women. These provide an opportunity to listen to the way they described their lives in their own terms rather than being constrained by how the survey 'allows' people to answer, muffling the specific tones of their own voice. While one woman spoke in an

unusually open way from the first, with the other it took the passage of time and many meetings for her to gradually reveal a quite complex, polyvocal narrative.

The studies drew attention to a number of issues which bear on women's wellbeing in close relationships in this context, and point to directions for future research. The first is violence. The quantitative survey produced the interesting finding that men's violence in the home has a more negative effect on men's sense of wellbeing than it does on women's. This indicates possible scope for a new approach to mobilisation against gender violence amongst men. Both women, however, had experienced violence in the family earlier in their lives and it had had long lasting consequences. For Mangali, it was one of the reasons for moving to live separately with her husband away from his parents. For Gulabi, it instilled a sense of caution and wariness, to behave in such a way that violence would not become an issue in her marital home.

The second theme that arose in characterising women's wellbeing in close relationships was work. Thapan (2003: 81) emphasises the importance of work to the sense of wellbeing amongst women in Delhi slums:

> Any sense of well-being they had came, to a large extent, from their engagement with, and commitment to, their work.

While Thapan here is referring implicitly to paid employment, the links between work and wellbeing in our research were more varied. It was striking, for example, how often men and women referred to work and the need for co-operation in and between various forms of labour, in describing the dynamics of their close relationships. This again suggests the inter-twining of material, relational and subjective dimensions of wellbeing that is a recurring theme throughout this volume. Within the case studies, Mangali stressed the 'work' of having to take the lead in representing the family and

negotiating on their joint behalf, contrasting their practice with what she felt was the appropriate gender division of labour. Gulabi stressed frequently the amount of work she had to do, and this was also quite visible in our many encounters with her. Work in the house was required of her not only to ensure the material reproduction of the home and family, but also as a form of labour in upholding the quality of relationships. Work outside the house she also justified in terms of her family responsibilities, but there was a much greater sense that this was something (also) for her personal fulfilment, rather than simply done under compulsion.

The third theme concerns speech and silence. Constructions of relationship wellbeing in the west place considerable emphasis on the relationship as a place of spoken intimacy. In this research, both qualitative and quantitative data and analysis suggest that in this community, there is much greater emphasis on the shared intimacy of understanding that does not need to be put into words, of the materiality of living side by side and providing care to one another, and indeed the hazard of speaking what is in one's heart. Doing, not talking, seems to provide the dominant idiom of family relations in this context. This clearly requires further research, but it again indicates the importance of grounding measures of wellbeing within a particular context, rather than assuming a 'universal' model will be appropriate for all.

This chapter clearly illustrates the implication of research methods in the accounts of wellbeing they produce. The particular relationship that is established between researcher and respondent is also of great importance. Although the chapter presents only parts of both women's narratives, in both cases, there are continuities between what they say in response to survey questions and in qualitative interviews. In addition to using the quantitative data in a conventional way at the aggregate level to test a hypothesis, this suggests there is merit in subjecting the numbers to a more

qualitative approach, reading individual's scores against their larger narrative which unfolds over time.

Finally, this chapter confirms the general observation that close relationships are of great importance to wellbeing. It draws attention in addition, however, to the conditional character of harmony in the home, and the material and emotional labour that women put into sustaining this. This reinforces arguments made elsewhere in this book about the importance of viewing both wellbeing and relationship as process rather than state, and indeed of the fact that such processes are not neutral, but deeply implicated in power.

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[A] Notes

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[2] Pseudonyms have been used following convention.

[3] The other domains are self- acceptance, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life and personal growth.

[4] Seligman's other elements are positive emotion, engagement, meaning and accomplishment.

[5] The findings are based on a single self-report item on satisfaction with life.

[6] The logic, they argue, is that more introverted and dissatisfied people will find it harder to find a partner, while happier people are more attractive and fun to be with (Stutzer and Frey (2006: 329). An alternative explanation could be that people with lower expectations are more likely to settle into marriage, and also to report themselves as satisfied with their lives!

[7] Kolkata was formerly known as Calcutta. This is the term that appears in these articles.

[8] See http://www.wellbeingpathways.org.uk for more information.

[9] The other domains are: economic confidence, agency and participation, social connections, physical and mental health, competence and self-worth, values and meaning.

[10] For detailed description of the Indian field-sites see White et al (2012a)

[11] The term 'Adivasi' literally meaning original inhabitants refers as a whole to communities that have traditionally lived in and depended on the forests for their livelihoods. While it is sometimes used interchangeably with the officially designated term Scheduled Tribes, which marks Adivasi communities for special benefits from the government the two terms are not necessarily coterminous (Bijoy 2003)

[12] As elsewhere in north India, a man may move to live with his parents-in-law if they have land but no sons, so he can provide labour on their land.

[13] The domain score for close relationships is based on the three items that emerged through factor analysis, as discussed above. The mean scores across the other domains similarly exclude a few rogue items shown by correlations and factor analysis.

[14] Factor analysis suggests that it belongs to the social connections domain.

[15] Our sample was composed of married men and women and single women, so this finding is not able to capture any differences between men by marital status. Nevertheless, gender is significant at $p<0.01$ (coefficient 0.1661) and marital status is significant at $p<0.05$ (coefficient 0.1208).

[16] Analysis of the 2011 data, the year of Mangali's interview, showed that gender/marital status did not predict the close relationships domain score, though it did predict significantly IWB considered as a single factor and some of the other domains (White et al. 2012a: 53-4). The fact that the 4.62 average close relationships domain score includes both men and women does not therefore form part of the explanation of why Mangali's score should be so different from the norm.

[17] The narrative of mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law not getting along are part-and-parcel of joint family life in India. It is understood that daughters-in-law bear their mothers-in-law's abuse as long as they are in a subservient position in the household. This changes with the passage of time, most usually when the mother-in-law is widowed (see Kandiyoti 1998, Palriwala 1999).

[18] The open school system allows candidates to appear at school examinations through a self-study programme rather than mandatory school attendance and is especially favoured by people who have unable to complete their school at the appropriate age.

[19] Panchayat is the lowest rung of the local self-government institutions; members are elected directly by the gram sabha which comprises all the adult (18+ years of age) members of the village community. Panchayat members are involved in overseeing the delivery of almost all government welfare schemes especially the flagship rural employment guarantee (MNREGS) and subsidised food distribution (PDS) (but not restricted to these). They are also in charge of making the lists of people targeted by these schemes which makes them quite powerful locally.

[20] As described above for the close relationship domain, the 2013 survey built on learning from 2011, so some of the items making up the domains were different in the two years. In 2013 we also had 5 items per domain, rather than 4.As with Mangali's domain scores, these reflect the items that were validated through factor analysis.

[21] In 2013 the items for this domain were: How well are your gods and goddesses looking after you? How lucky have you been in your life? How much peace do you experience peace in your mind/ heart? To what extent would you say that you fear harm from witchcraft or evil powers? To what extent do you feel that life has been good to you?

[22] This suggests the importance of economics to subjectivities, as argued with respect to Zambia in chapter five.

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Table 6.1. Close relationship items in round one fieldwork (2011)

1. Do you feel that there is unity in your family?
2. If problems arise in your family, how often are you able to discuss and sort them out?
3. How often is it that your family requires you to do things that you don't want?
4. How much do people in your house care for you?

Table 6.2 Close relationship items in round two fieldwork (2013)

1. How well do you get along amongst yourselves?
2. If there is a problem in your family how easily can you sort it out?
3. When your mind/heart is troubled/heavy, do you feel there is someone you can go to?
4. How much do people in your house care for you?
5. How uneasy are you made by the amount of violence in your home?

Table 6.3 Gulabi's domain scores, 2011 and 2013

Domain	2011	2013
Economic confidence	3.75	3.4
Agency and participation	4.5	4.4
Social connections	4.5	4.6
Close relationships	5	5
Physical and mental health	2	2.75
Competence and self-worth	3	4.2
Values and meaning	3.5	3.25

Figure 6.1 Gulabi's domain scores, pivot graph, 2011 and 2013